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ABSTRACT

The use of a student journal to relate the material covered in a particular course to real-life experiences has proven to be an effective technique that can be utilized in a wide variety of courses. This technique was adapted for use with two sections of Introductory Psychology at Emporia State University (Kansas). Students were required to write a journal rather than a term paper during the semester. The instructions provided to the students were to analyze everyday occurrences in the terminology of psychology, applying the theories and principles of psychology. Students were told to illustrate psychology with personal examples and were instructed to hand in the journal 10 times during the semester, with feedback provided each time. On each hand-in date, the journals had to have two written pages of quality material. This project was intended to enhance student understanding of psychology, teach the students to think, and add a more individualized element to a predominantly lecture-type course. A 38-item questionnaire was developed to evaluate the effectiveness of the journal project. Most of the questions were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale. Results of the study indicate that the students enjoyed the project and were encouraged to learn more about psychology and its relevance to their own lives. (SM)

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The Introductory Psychology Journal: A Technique For Increasing Course Relevance

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The Introductory Psychology Journal: A Technique For Increasing Course Relevance

Project Description

Hettich (1976, 1980) has reported the effective use of a student journal to relate the material covered in a particular course to their "real-life" experiences. Moreover, Hettich (1976, 1980) believes that this technique can be utilized in a wide variety of courses, e.g., Introductory, Experimental, Cognition, Learning, Physiological, Statistics, etc. During the Fall, 1987 semester this technique was adapted for use with two sections of Introductory Psychology at Emporia State University. In lieu of a term paper the students were required to prepare a journal during the semester. The instructions provided to the students were as follows.

What is the Journal?

The setting for your term project is, simply, your daily routine. The technique is to learn by relating course material to your thoughts and experiences. One of the main objectives of Introductory Psychology is to become aware of the relevance of psychology to your everyday life. Your assignment is to analyze everyday occurrences into the terminology of psychology, applying the theories and principles of psychology. In other words, illustrate psychology with your own examples.

This is your chance to see the everyday world from a psychological perspective. THERE IS PSYCHOLOGY BEYOND THE CLASSROOM!

Journal Writing Procedures

Your journal will be handed in 10 times during the semester. They will be collected and reviewed each time in order to give you feedback (i.e., a grade) on your progress with the project.

Your first step is to buy a small notebook (spiral, loose leaf, whatever). This will be your journal -- for this course ONLY. Next, start thinking. Watch people, listen to the lectures, read the text. Start connecting the psychological information with situations you notice in your daily routine.

On each of the 10 hand-in dates, you should have two pages written in your journal. The number of examples you cover is up to you. The only requirement is to turn in 2 pages of quality material.

Why A Journal?

Why was this project chosen for you? Primarily, because we feel that it will enhance your understanding of psychology. Second, we want to teach you to think. This assignment places a lot of responsibility on you to learn. Third, the journal projects adds a more individualized element to a predominantly lecture-type

course. Finally, we feel that the journal is more effective for the introductory psychology student than a research-style term paper.

Grading

Each of the 10 journal grades will be worth 10 points (i.e., the total of 100 points will be the same as a regular test). The journal will be evaluated according to your depth of thinking, accuracy of content, proper grammar, originality, creativity, and insightfulness.

Evaluation

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the journal project, a 38-item questionnaire was developed. Thirty-five of the questions were evaluated on five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree (1) - strongly agree (5). Mean responses and standard deviations for several relevant questions appear below:

Writing the journal increased my appreciation of psychology. (mean = 4.20, sd = .82).

I enjoyed writing the journal. (mean = 4.31, sd = .78).

The use of the journal stimulated me to think outside the classroom. (mean = 4.58, sd = .59).

The use of the journal made psychology more relevant to my personal life. (mean = 4.17, sd = .77).

I do not recommend that the journal be used in future introductory psychology classes. (mean = 1.37, sd = .98).

A complete summarization of the responses of both classes may be found it the handout that accompanies this presentation.

The final three questions asked the students to: (1) describe what the liked BEST about the journal, (2) what the liked LEAST about the journal, and (3) make any additional comments/suggestions. The most popular responses to these questions are shown below:

What did you like BEST about the journal?

a. interesting (n = 5)

b. easy (n = 6)

c. more meaningful than a research paper (n = 11)

d. having to think (n =4)

e. able to relate psychology to personal life (n = 20)

f. chance to give my own thoughts (n = 8)

What did you like LEAST about the journal?

a. hard to think of examples (n = 12)

b. taking time to write it, length required (n = 17)

Any other comments/suggestions?

a. Keep requiring it (n = 9)

In summary, this is an activity that the students enjoyed and, judging from their responses, encouraged them to learn more about psychology and its relevance to their own lives. Obviously, we will continue using this activity with introductory psychology classes with an eye toward expanding its usage with other classes.

References

Hettich, P. (1976). The journal: An autobiographical approach to learning. Teaching of Psychology, 2, 60-63.

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